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Garfield Linton

GRANDMA'S GARDEN SEEDS

Arthritis pinched her flesh and pricked her nerves; it jerked her knees with cold hands till the foundation of the house trembled to her heavy breathing. As far back as her mind stretched, there wasn't a time since she lived here and her knees didn't swell or hurt deeply. Grandma mixed hot water and Epsom salt to soak her stiffness and wipe away the pain. In gray hours of low clouds she felt like chopping off the knees and throwing them in the ocean, with all the throbbing and burning they gave. It didn't feel natural to be living in such a cold place, but she had been living here so long she'd be a stranger anywhere else.

God knows, the knees could be bad when they decided to, but they had a good side to them. Take our house, for instance; we didn't have to wait on TV weather predictions like other people. Grandma's knees, ever since she washed them in sea water, predicted everything for us. Like last summer when we had a heat wave that killed five people, everyone in our house was drinking lots of water and staying out of the sun long before the TV said a heat wave was on its way.

It was kind of chilly outside yesterday when Grandma made me dig up the garden, said her knees told her to prepare it for things to come. I went towards our neighbor's garden fork. But Grandma stopped me, said she didn't want any fork on her stuff; it's devil's instrument, and will only disease the soil she planned to sow her seeds. "These flower seeds are too precious. The hoe, on the other hand, is a special tool," she said, "and if it take a liking to you, it'll put on wings and plow the dirt like woodpeckers digging away on wood. That's if it take a liking to you like it did to your granddaddy. God bless his soul!"

★

Today Grandma, in her slender arms, is kind of chilly outside to Onis, and puts him to dry for telling her it's about time she come here and borrow the hoe draped across the next-door neighbor's closet. Grandma

stops and points him back in dirt on her garden. Onis cannot be planted, so he gets up and waddles across the street. He doesn't know how to grow. He wants to disease on his sister's plants, flower-seed on her feelings. "The hoe, every last piece of tool you have in your possession," Grandma tells him, "use it and wing the dirt like a plow on somebody else's everything," then cries "Kre! Kre!" and is done with him.

★

So here I'm hiding under the sofa, waiting, looking back. Shiqua sits beside me to work up the garden while Grandma and Grandpa, way up ahead with the beginning in their hands, sit on violets and high-yellow sun before they start their digging. But as usual, Onis messes up everything. Grandma stares at dust floating every which way among clumps of clay concentrating on my face, then she comes to my rescue by stopping effects before they could find a final cause in me. Onis tried once, then tried again when first he did not succeed in hurting me. He drives Shiqua to take off with my seed planting ability in her hands. Shiqua, who'd lived with me before I got down to taking care of Onis, suspending night before each horizon without words, is my everything. Far away from full blackness beneath itself, Onis, in the soul of Grandpa's morning image, departing time with one stare at Grandma's central eye, hits her concentration off balance. "What's the problem, Grandma?" Shiqua wants to know why complete creases digging into the brown of Grandma's face are taking away the only peace in the house for a ride to hell. Onis again, he is causing effect.

Shiqua wants to leave in a hurry with me. But Onis is casting a spell on the moment: "Kill thyself or take him down before he shows himself, cause I know him."

"Who are you talking to is what I want to know," I said to the little midget. "You, pleasure of ugly love. Yes You! One deep whisper of mine can forever cause you, so watch your step." I tell him to the face, but Grandma warns me:

"You best to drop and play blessed soul to heaven by trees in front of the house when your ex-brother wants your soul. Just do it. Do it for me, baby, give him what he wants."

“Who the hell was he talking to though, Shinqa?” Onis said, trying to act powerful. Shinqa has had enough of his mouthing by now. She switches him off once and for all; his voice was removed from the throat up by her car keys. “I don’t know what we did to him in the past,” Shinqa stands by me looking puzzled at his make-up, “but he is carrying the grief of an entire nation.”

“It’s not what we did to him, my child. He was bound to happen sooner or later; all families have one of him.” Grandma comforts Shinqa’s heart as always after destruction. Now I am left out here all alone while she gets to enter Grandma’s arms extended across the garden. She went to see why Onis was using polar fields, circling coils in his heavy heart as gravity to pull the family down from under their feet when his job was to guard us against negative influences till a positive force comes into our lives.

★

Shinqa shook back to me. I tried to reach out and touch her world. But as if she were in a vacuum, she let go of me and everything around her. Then Onis popped out again like a little weasel in a huge corn field. Luckily Grandma had a nose for smell when his mess to the side touched her nerve, hanging on sculptures of pottery seen by everyone passing: He was a huge fish tied to a stick like summer night cutting Grandma’s law. The delicate strength of her books stood up and put him in place. Onis was trying to rub his hands over everybody’s mind in the neighborhood.

★

Living with Shinqa is great. I feel proud to know I’m part of the deal turning seeds to flowers. Whenever she begins breathing harder while riding sounds only trees can make, I know everything will go in order. And these are the times I call out, “Mama!” I can’t help but to, so somebody else can know how my Shinqa is coming like a blast out of something heading home.

“Who called for me?” Onis talks to Shinqa roughly, as if he didn’t know he was the second-born. But she nods him away. “I heard names in the wind out here knocking on my door.”

Grandma puts up a word for her: "Whatever you say, Onis, whatever you say."

★

A huge rat, the biggest Shinqa ever saw, cast a shadow over our bed and left us without light. Onis was trying to be again. Shinqa's family eye as a birthright to see things for the rest saw the rat, Onis, trying to be something other than a rodent. I could not walk away, not with him overshadowing us like that. He was going for blood and the flesh of his own would do.

"What's that towards the alley peering through the peep-hole, child?" Grandma eyed the picture, me and Onis. He had me cornered and I swore to the very moment: Daddy died for *possuming* while working on a rocking back and forth for months in one spot, but not me. I wasn't going to possum for Onis. Shinqa stepped out from Grandma's legs and stopped watching violets and sun. She turned her head up straight and looked dead at Onis' mind in groves of water plants' belly. "Why can't we ever see you resting on time without blading everybody's way?" Shinqa asked. Onis resisted again and slapped her figure for glancing at his time piece, then Grandma stepped in. "Don't bone structure your forms, neither one of you. Don't you ever!" she told them. "It has been keeping us from going homeless, my babies." Grandma finally embraced Onis. Shinqa liked the statue keeping all of us together. From a little girl to now she couldn't help standing and walking to Grandma's beat. "How can you ask me if Onis is one of us? Cut my blood and see." Grandma squinted her eyes at her.

"I didn't mean it. I really didn't mean anything." Shinqa stood beside Grandma, and moved Onis' skin-and-bone out of harm's way.

I saw the opportunity, so I asked Grandma what were we running from back in days when folks weren't running and why. It made my blood run cold to the middle of the street with Onis pounding on our heels before I could steer up the middle of the exit.

"Look through the rear-view, children," Grandma said before we hugged each other. Shinqa and Grandma watched the more than large rat, live as ever, crawl, heart-beat pounding while I possumed so Onis could nibble on my big toe for blood and flesh. After he had a taste of

everybody's life, from Grandma all the way down to me, Shiqua widened her eyes till her third one blinked. "I'm scared, Grandma, scared," she admitted, "plain scared."

★

Father was responsible for tucking Onis away where the world in the original went down for a long time, but Shiqua brought us back with her family eyes and strong legs through Grandma's arms. "You look like the devil just gone to bed," Grandma said back to us in the direction of her bedroom. Grandma talked a spell. Our hugging and togetherness as one family under a single name placed her heart in marriage reception, pictures of heartbeat combined with Father's in the midst of the mantle piece. "Only with my children down can there be darkness without light. Ain't that right, Shiqua?" And that was that.